

"DTV" IS COMING (AND SOONER THAN YOU THINK!)

FCC Consumer Facts

At midnight on February 17, 2009, federal law requires that all full-power television broadcast stations stop broadcasting in analog format and broadcast only in digital format. Here's what these requirements will mean for you and your television viewing.

Why Are Broadcast TV Stations Switching to All-Digital?

Congress mandated all-digital broadcasting, also known as the digital television (DTV) transition, because digital is a more efficient transmission technology that allows broadcast stations to provide improved picture and sound quality, as well as provide more programming options for consumers through multiple broadcast streams (multicasting). In addition, all-digital broadcasting will free up many frequencies to be used for public safety, such as police, fire, and emergency rescue, and for the provision of additional, advanced commercial wireless services for consumers.

What Do I Need To Do To Be Ready For The DTV Transition?

What you need to do depends on the source of your television programming, whether you receive programming over-the-air or from a paid provider such as a cable or satellite TV company.

How Do I Receive Digital Broadcasts If I Don't Subscribe To Cable Or Satellite?

If you receive only free over-the-air television programming, the type of TV you own, either a digital TV or an analog TV, is very important. Consumers who receive only free over-the-air television



may view digital programming through a TV set with a built-in digital tuner (integrated DTV) or a digital-ready monitor with a separate digital tuner set-top box. (Both of these digital television types will be referred to as a DTV.) The only additional equipment required to view over-the-air digital programming with a DTV is a regular antenna, either on your roof or a smaller version on your TV such as “rabbit ears.”

If you have an analog television and do not own a DTV, you will have to purchase a digital-to-analog set-top converter box to attach to your TV set to be able to view over-the-air digital programming (see “What About My Analog TV?” below).

How Do I Receive Digital Broadcasts If I Do Subscribe To Cable Or Satellite?

If you receive cable or satellite television service, contact your cable or satellite provider about any additional components, such as a digital set-top box, that you may need to watch digital broadcast programming. If you’re a cable subscriber, you can also receive digital programming using a “digital cable ready” or “plug-and-play” television. Using this type of television, digital cable subscribers do not need a separate set-top box. With these televisions you also can obtain from your cable operator a CableCARD that will permit you to view programming.

How Do I Know Whether I Own a DTV?

The FCC requires all televisions manufactured or imported into the United States after March 1, 2007, to incorporate digital tuners. For televisions manufactured before this date with only an analog tuner that are still being sold, the FCC requires retailers to prominently display a consumer advisory that states:



This television receiver has only an analog broadcast tuner and will require a converter box after February 17, 2009, to receive over-the-air-broadcasts with an antenna because of the Nation's transition to digital broadcasting. Analog-only TVs should continue to work as before with cable and satellite TV services, gaming consoles, VCRs, DVD players, and similar products. For more information, call the Federal Communications Commission at 1-888-225-5322 (TTY: 1-888-835-5322) or visit the Commission's digital television Web Site at: www.dtv.gov.

The FCC required retailers to begin displaying this label regarding analog-only TVs on May 25, 2007. Be sure to look for this label if you are purchasing a new TV. If you bought your TV before May 25, 2007, and aren't sure whether it can receive digital programming, ask your consumer electronics retailer or check the manufacturer's Web Site.

What About My Analog TV? Will It Still Work?

After February 17, 2009, you will be able to receive and view over-the-air digital programming with an analog TV only by purchasing a digital-to-analog set-top converter box. Digital-to-analog converter boxes will be offered primarily by consumer electronics retailers. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), a part of the Department of Commerce, can provide up to two coupons per household worth \$40 each toward the purchase of digital-to-analog set-top converter boxes for analog TVs.



You'll only be able to use these coupons on converter boxes that meet standards certified by the FCC to meet the standards established by NTIA. Look for the FCC logo if you want to use a coupon when purchasing a digital-to-analog converter box, because some uncertified boxes may also be available for sale. For more information and to apply for coupons (from January 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009) visit the NTIA Web Site at www.ntia.doc.gov.

With a digital-to-analog converter box attached to an analog TV, you will experience many of the benefits of digital television, including improved picture quality and the ability to view multicast streams provided by local broadcasters. However, to enjoy all of the benefits of DTV – including digital picture and sound – you must buy an integrated DTV or a digital display monitor and external digital tuner

If I Buy a DTV, Will My VCR, DVD Player, Camcorder, Video Games, Or Other Equipment Still Work?

VCRs, DVD players, camcorders and video games will continue to work, even if they are only analog-capable. Such equipment, however, may not provide digital-quality picture and sound. Manufacturers are producing a number of different connectors to hook equipment together and improve picture and sound quality. Check with your equipment retailer to determine the types of connectors that will work with your equipment.



How Much Will DTV Improve My TV Viewing?

While picture quality will vary according to whether you receive digital programming in high definition (HDTV), enhanced definition (EDTV), or standard definition (SDTV) format, all digital programming provides an enhanced viewing experience. HDTV, the highest quality format, provides high resolution, a widescreen format, and surround sound.

How Much Will a DTV Cost?

Prices vary depending on the many features and options available to consumers, including format, display technology, and screen size. Display technology choices include cathode ray tube screens, rear projection TVs, front projection TVs, and flat panel TVs. Flat panel TVs, often the most expensive, can use either a liquid crystal display (LCD) or plasma screen technology. Screen size is measured diagonally across the screen, and the larger the screen, generally the more expensive the TV. To determine the equipment and features that are right for you, learn about DTV from our Web Site and discuss your options with your retailer.



For More Information

For more information about DTV and the digital transition, visit our Web Site at www.dtv.gov, which provides links to several other informative Web Sites. You can also contact our Consumer Center by e-mailing dtvinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554.

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